1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

the Bak'a himself tell why he has come the long way to the Saramacca river and what it is he seeks."

There was a general chorus of agreement, and silence awaited our accounting.

As the town man began to repeat our words to the Granman, the quiet of the house was heightened by an occasional stirring outside the paling. From where we sat, we could see brown motionless feet, which told us that there were many more than those inside, who were listening to the white man's reason for being in the bush.

Again the Granman made the traditional responses.

"So it is, white man."

"True, what you have said, bassia."

Finally our telling was at an end. Again there was a silence as we sat, tensely waiting.

The Granman again broke the silence.

"Friends, chiefs, you have heard. The white man is here. He comes to learn of our life. The gods of the river have brought him and his woman safely. The Great God sent the rain to cool the air when he reached Asindopo Lantiwe. The gods are more than I am. The river is more than I am. But the Saramacca people are also more than I am. It is you, headmen of the Saramacca people, who must speak."

"Ai, G'aman," said the man who had the stripes of white on him and who wore the many obias. "But have the ancestors spoken?"

"Truly you ask, friend," was the response. "It is well that you think of these things. In the bush, we think before we speak. Do you go aside and consider well."

Slowly the members of the krutu arose from their benches. Softly, with bent form, each passed out of the doorway. We were alone with the Granman, who waited with us for the reply of the chiefs.

5

As the elders slowly filed out of the council house, it was as though a jury were leaving the courtroom to decide a case which had been laid before it. And as we learned more,

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-6 (1928-1929) 1934
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we found that for the krutu to act as a jury was an important part of its work. The krutu not only saw to the making of law, but it was also the medium for levying penalties upon those who transgressed law. The same krutu that legislated could judge infractions of its legislation. In its hands was the power to enforce the decisions it had made against the offender. 623 693

We had wondered whether, in this Suriname bush, the African court which so characterized the civilization of the ancestors of these people had survived. When we heard of the supernatural vengeance which followed upon infractions of custom, we sought to find out if people took the matter of punishment into their own hands, if kunu was reinforced by human assistance. 623 693 681

"Ai, mati," a chief once said to us, "kunu is strong, but the krutu is strong, too."

If a man had sworn an oath against another, had called down upon another a curse of some evil spirit, or asked that the gods make a man impotent, or that they stop the womb of his wife from conceiving, or if a man murdered by means other than witchcraft, then he was judged by a krutu. A man who had destroyed a canoe belonging to another—a serious offense, for, as the Bush Negro says, "Had our forefathers not had the wisdom to build canoes, we would still be slaves to the Bak'a"—he, too, would come before this court. The adulterer would be brought here for the assessment of his fine. [683] [685] [684]

When the krutu sat as a court, the accused was not without the right of defense. If it were thieving, or adultery, or the telling of falsehoods, or trespass, or the destruction of the property of another, where the kunu involved was not of the greatest, then the case was judged on the basis of the evidence. In the court, the interests of the one who was accused were cared for by one of the elders of his *mâ*, his relative and a fellow member of his own great family. But when the crime was one of the greater ones, then methods other than the sole use of testimony were employed. Evidence was necessary, but evidence was not 623 695

/18 cont./

766 787 times, no noticeable movement has been observed, the answer is negative, and one proceeds with the corpse all the way to the end of the crowd ranged on either side. Everyone endeavors to be present on such occasions in order not to cast any blame upon himself or to arouse suspicion.

If, however, the answer is in the affirmative, then one asks whether the right person or a close relative of his is here; if the answer to this is also affirmative, one proceeds to inquire about the degree of blood relationship until one has finally discovered who the actual person is. Since this happens in the presence of so many persons as witnesses, it is regarded as valid proof, and the corpse is buried. However incomprehensible and impossible this may appear, this procedure is nonetheless actually practiced constantly among the Bush Negroes. I have been an eyewitness several times. [123]

695 [693] A few days later the person indicated, in case he was not present at the above-mentioned inquiry, is tracked down, if necessary fetched forcibly, and brought before the governor or the chief, who questions him in the presence of the captains or the council members. In case of denial, he is offered something to drink, which, however, he will not accept if he is guilty, since it has become apparent that whoever drinks it with a pounding or uneasy heart frequently manifests immediate symptoms, such as vomiting, swelling, chlorosis, and so forth. If the person has been prepared to brave this (in spite of the conviction of his misdeed), he is put to death by means of the most horrible and unheard-of tortures, whereas in the case of confession he is forced with the whip to reveal whom else he has poisoned during his life. [681]

696 682 All the relatives of the poisoned person are then called in order to be present at the punishment and to pull on his ears with all possible force by means of a pair of pincers, one after another. Subsequently a bowl with pinda biaf is set before him, in which a turtle must be boiled, as well as a tomtom made of ripe bananas. All this, after all, is regarded as the tastiest food. He is then /19/ again severely beaten with a whip, whereupon he must eat what has been prepared for him, and immediately afterwards [262]

/25 cont./

928 695 (344) The peace conditions are determined in a large building (shed). This shed is entirely open, they call it their court of justice, derived from kroetoe hoso or piketti (1). When they find

1. Piketti, place where the execution of the punishment takes place.

themselves there, whether this takes place after the conclusion of an internecine battle, or between spouses, members of a family, or former friends, the heads of the parties gather in the shed referred to and choose their places in the upper part of the building. Subsequently those concerned in this manner place themselves in the vicinity of the heads, and around these all those present who make up the public.

When all have been placed, one of the heads takes a cup (as a rule a calabash) filled with dram or still unfermented sugar (769) (782) cane. He scatters a few drops of this on the ground in various places in the shed, which signifies that their ancestors, who also once sat on this spot and passed judgment, are to be called up in the memory of all, and that the deceased, by having this offering presented to them first, have had respect paid to them.

Once this solemnity has been carried out, the cup goes around to each one, and each of those present takes a small draught from it. After it has been emptied, and none of them has refrained from drinking from it, the peace is regarded as concluded, all feuds are forgiven, and the enmity has ceased to exist.

Should it happen that one of those present refuses to drink, then he must publicly give the reason for his refusal, and then it may sometimes happen that the considerations concerning the quarrel start anew.

(693) /26/ Then the elders or council members ordinarily withdraw from the shed and leave behind only their granman (1).

1. Head or governor.

Those who have withdrawn divide themselves into different groups and consult with one another, make the matter clear and

/13 cont./

643 644 586 The present grand man, contrary to his predecessors, has only one wife. She is dressed like the other women and works at her clearing like everyone else, /14/ but her marriage to the grand man imposes special obligations on her: she can not divorce him; neither can he repudiate her.

643 829 The attitude of the Boni toward the grand man is a curious mixture of respect and disparagement. They regard him as the living symbol of their nation, and each one resents as if it were a personal insult an outsider having an incorrect attitude toward him. But their undisciplined spirit kicks up at the measures he is obliged to take to make them respect customary law, and even the authority of a poised and benevolent man like Grand Man Difu is not willingly accepted. As a matter of fact, the Boni stand for the authority of the grand man as they adhere to the worship of their gods, by the feeling of an absolute and inexorable necessity: in their minds the grand man is above all the priest of Odun; if the grand man were not there, they would be without defense against the wisiman, without recourse against the vengeance exercised by the yaka of the dead of other lineages.

The political power of the grand man is entirely based on these beliefs, and if they were to collapse, he would disappear with them. Nobody would submit to any other law than that of the lineage, founded upon fear of the ancestors.

692 693 The lloni kuutu. This is the assembly of the men, without distinction of age (1) or kinship; this council (lloni = law) constitutes the legal apparatus of the Boni.

1. There is no precise rule for fixing the age from which an adolescent may sit in this council. It is apparently when he has reached full physical development and earns his living by his own efforts, about 18 to 20 years. He does not have to be married.

/14 cont./

692 693 [641] An essential principle of the social life of the Refugee Blacks is that every citizen carries the law within himself. If several men are requested to arbitrate a private quarrel, it is said that they form a lanti kuutu. But they can hand down only a sentence of conciliation. Only the general assembly convoked by the grand man has the power to impose its decision.

692 995 The ordinary role of the lanti kuutu is to judge the dead, to make sure that they were not wisimã (sorcerers), to proceed to their interrogation in order to give the force of law to the answers, especially in what concerns inheritance.

692 693 775 The lanti kuutu meets when a death is announced; the first to arrive go to the grand man who designates two of the captains to preside over the council this time (for all the members are equal). In fact, rare are the councils attended by all the men present in the villages. Most of the time the lanti kuutu groups only about 30 men, mostly old men.

692 The lanti kuutu meets very rarely to judge a living man. That has happened only three times between 1948 and 1957.

692 687 In 1948 the grand man convoked the lanti kuutu to judge a man who, duly called as boatman to take him to Saint-Laurent, had not come. He was sentenced to make a palissade around the grand man's habitation, which took more than a month of work. /15/

692 685 In 1953 the council met to judge Loko (Dju), who had made himself guilty of aggravated theft (simulated shipwreck to the detriment of a Bensdorp trader and resale of the merchandise), for which he had been condemned by French justice to several months in prison. Loko had to make honorable amends in the presence of the assembled members of his lineage, then he was sentenced to make 30 planks for the benefit of the grand man.

[224] [243] In August, 1957, the council met to judge Pousto (Asisi-Dju), 23 years old, and Amusapé (Asisi-Aw.B.), 70 years old, who were guilty of a grave offense: misappropriation of a tapir (malpouri) killed by a Djuka who, feeling gratitude toward the grand man, had made known his intention to offer him part of the meat.